

Notable Louisiana African Americans

From Governors to school children, African Americans have helped shape the rich and unique history of Louisiana for over 300 years.

Below are just a few of the men and women who have helped to make Louisiana the great state it is today.

Rev. Avery Alexander, Civil Rights Activist and Legislator (1910-1999)

(from Terrebonne Parish)

"A member of the NAACP, Rev. Alexander traveled statewide participating in voter registration drives in the years before the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed. In New Orleans, he helped to organize several boycotts against white businesses to hire blacks for jobs above the 'broom and mop' level. He also led a successful boycott against New Orleans Public Service, Inc. to hire the first black bus drivers."

(SOURCE: <http://nutrias.org/~nopl/info/aarcinfo/notabl2.htm>)



Louis Armstrong, Musician and Composer (1901-1971)

(from New Orleans)

"Louis Armstrong was the greatest of all Jazz musicians. Armstrong defined what it was to play Jazz. His amazing technical abilities, the joy and spontaneity, and amazingly quick, inventive musical mind still dominate Jazz to this day."

(SOURCE: <http://www.redhotjazz.com/louie.html>)

Andrew Felton Brimmer, Economist and Federal Reserve Governor (1926-)

(from Newellton)

"While working on his doctorate at Harvard in the 1950's, Brimmer went to work for the Federal Reserve Bank of New York as an economist. During the Kennedy administration, Brimmer became assistant secretary of economic affairs in the U.S. Department of Commerce, and served until 1966. That same year he began an eight-and-a-half year term on the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. While there, he became the first African American governor of the Federal Reserve and later formed his own consulting company, Brimmer & Co."

(SOURCE: <http://www.thehistorymakers.com/biography/biography.asp?bioindex=480&category=businessMakers>)

Arna Wendell Bontemps, Harlem Renaissance Author and Librarian (1902-1973)

(from Alexandria)

"Bontemps is credited with writing over 20 books, plays, and anthologies and was considered the leading authority on the Harlem Renaissance. He was part of a core of young Black writers who led the 'New Negro' movement. Bontemps wanted a front row seat to view and participate in the stirrings of jazz, theater and literature taking place in Harlem. His scholarly interest in fostering a new appraisal of his race and reevaluation of the Black man's place in American history is just a part of his legacy. His children's books are unique and his poetry and writings convey the rhythms and richness of the African American culture which was to influence a number of writers who followed him."

(SOURCE: <http://www.arnabontempsmuseum.com/Default.aspx?tabid=530>)

Ruby Bridges, Civil Rights Pioneer (1954-)

(from New Orleans)

"On the morning of her first day at William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans, Ruby Bridges' mother told her: 'Now I want you to behave yourself today, Ruby, and don't be afraid.' And Ruby and her mother went to the school, where so many people were outside, shouting and throwing things that the little girl thought it must be Mardi Gras. She seemed to be remembering her mother's words as she entered the school without showing any fear at all, despite the fact that it was 1960, there were U.S. Marshals walking beside her, and she was the first black child to enter an all-white school in the history of the American South."

(SOURCE: <http://www.rubybridges.org/story.htm>)



Fats Domino, Singer and Songwriter (1928-)

(from New Orleans)

"They call him the Fat Man. With his easy-rolling boogie-woogie piano and smooth rhythm & blues vocals, Antoine "Fats" Domino put a New Orleans-style spin on what came to be known as rock and roll. A pianist, singer, and songwriter who was born in the Crescent City in 1928, Domino sold more records (65 million) than any Fifties-era rocker except Elvis Presley. Between 1950 and 1963, he cracked the pop Top Forty thirty-seven times and the R&B singles chart fifty-nine times."

(SOURCE: <http://www.rockhall.com/hof/inductee.asp?id=91>)

Norman Francis, Educator (1931-)

(from Lafayette)

"His father, a barber, and his mother, a homemaker, sacrificed to send Norman Francis to St. Paul Catholic elementary and secondary schools. After graduation, Francis attended Xavier University in New Orleans. At Xavier University, Francis began an association that would last a lifetime...In 1968 [Francis was named] president of Xavier University. His presidency has been marked by unparalleled growth. Francis created a campus that is referred to locally as the "Emerald City" because of its aqua-green roofs. Francis' thirty-seven years as president distinguished him as the longest serving president of any college in the United States."

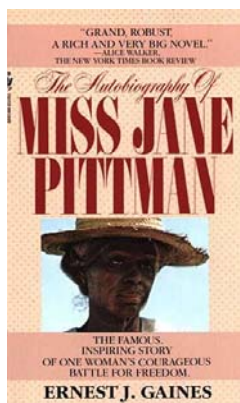
(SOURCE: <http://www.lra.louisiana.gov/brdFrancis.html>)

Ernest J. Gaines, Author (1933-)

(from Point Coupee Parish)

"Gaines published his first short story in 1956. Since then he has written eight books of fiction, including Catherine Carmier, Of Love and Dust, Bloodline, The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman, A Long Day in November, In My Father's House, and A Gathering of Old Men. A Lesson Before Dying, his most recent novel, won the 1993 National Book Critics Circle Award. He has also been awarded a MacArthur Foundation grant, for writings of 'rare historical resonance.'"

(SOURCE: <http://aallbc.com/authors/ernest.htm>)

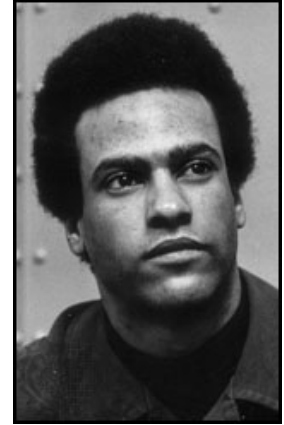


Huey Newton, Civil Rights Activist (1942-1989)

(from Monroe)

"Huey Newton, the youngest of seven children, was born in Monroe, on 17th February, 1942. His father, who named his son after the radical politician, Huey P. Long, was an active member of the NAACP. At Merritt College in Oakland, California, Newton met Bobby Seale and in 1966 they formed the Black Panther Party. Initially established to protect local communities from police brutality and racism, it eventually developed into a Marxist revolutionary group. The Black Panthers also ran medical clinics and provided free food to school children."

(SOURCE: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAnewtonH.htm>)



Mahalia Jackson, Gospel Singer (1911-1972)

(from New Orleans)

"Mahalia Jackson is viewed by many as the pinnacle of gospel music. Her singing began at the age of four in her church, the Plymouth Rock Baptist Church in New Orleans. Her early style blended the freedom and power of gospel with the stricter style of the Baptist Church. As a teenager, through her cousin's aid, she was influenced by such famous singers as Bessie Smith, Ida Cox, Enrico Caruso and Ma Rainey, and her own style began to emerge into a more soulful expression."

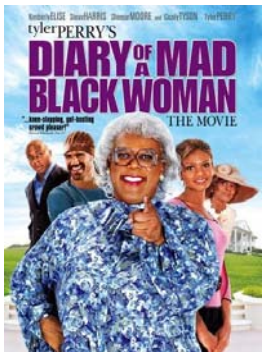
(SOURCE: <http://www.lkwdpl.org/wihohio/jack-mah.htm>)

Tyler Perry, Playwright and Actor (1969-)

(from New Orleans)

"Tyler Perry is the writer, producer and co-star of the box office hit Diary of a Mad Black Woman. But it was a long hard road. In 1992 Perry wrote letters to himself in an effort to deal with his childhood pain. These would provide the basis for the musical I Know I've Been Changed about adult survivors of child abuse. Initially, however, I Know I've Been Changed was a flop. Over the next 6 years, Perry found himself homeless on several occasions. He had come to the point of giving up on the show, when in 1998, the turning point came. I Know I've Been Changed opened at the House of Blues and sold out eight times over."

(SOURCE: <http://www.biogs.com/famous/perrytyler.html>)



P.B.S. Pinchback, Governor (1837-1921)

(from Baton Rouge)

"Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback was the first African American to become governor of a U.S. State. During the Civil War, Pinchback traveled to Louisiana and became the only African-American officer in the Union-controlled Louisiana Native Guards. After the war, he became active in the Republican Party and participated in Reconstruction state conventions. In 1868, Pinchback was elected as Louisiana state senator, where he became the Senate president pro tempore. He became lieutenant governor following the death of Oscar Dunn, the first elected African-American lieutenant governor of a U.S. State. Pinchback was elevated to the Louisiana governorship upon the impeachment and removal from office of his predecessor, Republican governor Henry Clay Warmouth, for political corruption. After his governorship, Pinchback was instrumental in establishing Southern University in 1879."

(SOURCE: <http://www.africanamericans.com/PBSPinchback.htm>)



Homer Plessy, Civil Rights Activist, Businessman (1862-1925)

(from New Orleans)

"A Creole of European and African descent, Homer Plessy was arrested and jailed in 1892 for sitting in a Louisiana railroad car designated for white people only. Plessy had violated the 1890 state law that called for racially segregated facilities. Plessy went to court, claiming the law violated the 13th and 14th amendments, but Judge John Howard Ferguson found him guilty anyhow. By 1896 the case had gone all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, who also found Plessy guilty by an 8-1 majority. The resulting doctrine of "separate but equal" institutionalized segregation in the United States until overturned in 1954 by the case of Brown v. Board of Education."

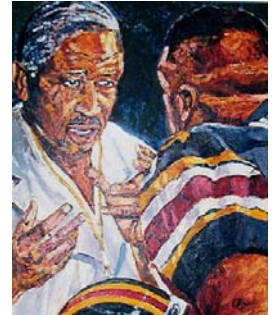
(SOURCE: <http://www.answers.com/topic/homer-plessy>)

Eddie G. Robinson, Coach and Member, Football Hall of Fame (1919-)

(from Grambling)

"On October 5, 1985, Grambling State University head football coach Eddie Robinson made history at Cotton Bowl Stadium in Dallas, Texas when his Tigers beat Prairie View A&M 27-7 for the 324th victory in his collegiate coaching career. That victory vaulted him ahead of the University of Alabama's Paul "Bear" Bryant and made him the winningest coach in college football history. He would go on to win 84 more games before retiring in 1997 with an astounding 408 career victories. Coach Robinson spent his career building bridges of excellence for African-American youth in the game of football. By imparting to his players his system of learning and of mastering the game, Robinson paved the way for over two hundred of them to play professionally, and for four of that number to be inducted into the Professional Football Hall of Fame."

(SOURCE: <http://www.eddierobinson.com/aboutCoach.asp>)



Madame C.J. Walker, Entrepreneur and Philanthropist (1867-1919)

(from Delta)

"After a series of bereavements that left her orphaned at 6 and widowed at 20, she and her daughter A'Lelia moved to St. Louis to start over. She worked days as a washerwoman and went to night school before inventing a process for straightening the hair of African-Americans. Her process, combining her unique formula with brushes and heated combs, caught on. In 1910 she formed Madame C. J. Walker Laboratories in Indianapolis, where she developed products and trained her beauticians, known as 'Walker Agents.' At her death, the multi-million dollar estate was left to various philanthropic organizations and to her daughter, whose philanthropic endeavors were key to funding the Harlem Renaissance."

(SOURCE: <http://www.madamecjwalker.com/>)



Lynn Whitfield, Actress (1953-)

(from Baton Rouge)

"African American leading lady Lynn Whitfield made her film bow in 1983's Dr. Detroit. Three years later, the Louisiana born and bred Whitfield played the title character in the fact-based TV movie Johnnie Mae Gibson: FBI, the story of the first black female FBI agent. After gaining recognition for her work in a number of TV dramas, including The Women of Brewster Place (1990), Whitfield won an Emmy award and international acclaim for her starring performance in the HBO biopic The Josephine Baker Story in 1991. Whitfield subsequently split her efforts between TV and film, including Eve's Bayou (1997) as a family matriarch struggling with her husband's infidelity. In 1999, she earned an NAACP Image Award nomination for her work in Oprah Winfrey Presents: The Wedding."

(SOURCE: <http://video.barnesandnoble.com/search/Biography.asp?ctr=661441>)

Andrew Young, Civil Rights Activist, Legislator and Ambassador (1932-)

(from New Orleans)

"A pastor, civil and human rights leader, Andrew Young began his career in public service in the 1960s as a close associate of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. During Dr. King's tenure as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, he organized many of King's famous marches and was with King at the time of his assassination. In 1972, he ran and won the Congressional seat for the Fifth District of Georgia, making him the first African-American Member of Congress from Georgia in 101 years. In January 1977, Young was appointed U.S. Representative to the United Nations, and he remained in that position until September 1979. Young became mayor of Atlanta in January 1982."

(SOURCE: <http://a-s.clayton.edu/mlking/Youngbio.htm>)